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# The Art and Artifice of Early Sports Photography

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## Abstract

The rise of modern sport in the mid-nineteenth century coincided with the emergence of photography as a new image-making medium. Thus both practices developed in parallel. Notably, many early photographers turned to sport as a subject for their work, despite the early technological limitations of the medium. Histories of photography have, however, tended to overlook this. Similarly, sport historians have tended to regard these early photographs simply as illustrative material rather than important innovations in the formation of new visual conventions for the representation of sport. This paper seeks to redress this by exploring, in close detail, examples of sports photography produced in the mid- to late-nineteenth century. More importantly, it examines the visual vocabularies deployed by these early photographers within the context of contemporary art practices, demonstrating how artistry and artifice were deployed in the production of some of the earliest, and finest, examples of sports photography ever produced.

Keywords: sport, photography, sports photography, tennis, golf, St Andrews, Hill and Adamson, William Notman, Scotland

The 71<sup>st</sup> Royal Academy of Arts annual exhibition held in London in 1839 has become famous as the occasion on which JMW Turner exhibited one of his best known works, *The Fighting Temeraire, Lugged to her Last Berth to be Broken Up*, recently voted by BBC audiences 'The Greatest Painting in Britain'.<sup>1</sup> However, also on display at the exhibition that year was another work by a less well-known, though nonetheless influential artist, Thomas George Webster. Like Turner's contribution, though in contrast to many of the works exhibited alongside, Webster's *A Football Game* (illus. 1) eschewed classical and historical subjects in favour of a contemporary theme.<sup>2</sup> It represents a large group of over a dozen boys, all piling on top of each other in a melee on a stretch of scrubland with a handful of rural dwellings in the background. The summer setting, and indication of other festivities taking place in the background, suggests the kind of carnivalistic celebration typically enacted on holidays in English villages up and down the country in the early nineteenth century. Two boys emerge from the front of this chaotic crowd, one kicking a ball forward, the other raising his arm defensively in a gesture that modern rugby fans might describe as a hand-off. A diminutive lad stands as the only barrier before this crowd, though his apprehensive, hesitant posture suggests that he will be able to do little to prevent further forward motion. The game here being played seems far from organized or regulated and the clutching of injured heads, elbows and shins certainly implies that aggressive combat is a core element in this competition.. However, the overall mood is one of exuberant bucolic pleasure. This is manifested through the cleanliness of the players, the broad smile of the figure at the apex of the composition and the energetic enthusiasm of the small boy on the right of the scene, too young to participate yet barely able to contain his desire to do so. As a representation of popular sporting activities

practised amongst small rural communities, Webster's work is unusual in early-nineteenth-century art and carries much significance for both art historians and sport historians. Certainly few other paintings, produced at this time, represented sport conducted beyond the Arcadian setting of Ancient Greece, or the playing fields of England's public schools. In this context, the work has acquired a reputation as the pre-eminent and iconic representation of pre-codification sport, a visual signifier of a moment immediately preceding the transition from the leisurely sporting pursuits of the early modern era to the increasingly regulated and commercialized practices that we now define as modern sport.

The date of the production and first display of this work is here of some significance. By 1839 the first shoots of what is now referred to as organized sport were beginning to appear, facilitated by the expansion of urban populations as part of the broader industrialization process. For example, that year saw the first staging of what would later be dubbed the 'Grand National' at Aintree racecourse in Liverpool (Pinfold 1998, 146).<sup>3</sup> Popular attendance at this early sporting spectacle was certainly boosted by the recent opening of railways connecting Liverpool not only to Manchester but also to the Midlands and London (Pinfold 1998, 148). Henley on Thames also played host to its inaugural regatta in 1839, the same year that Surrey, Britain's oldest county cricket club, was founded. It has also recently been argued that Barnes Rugby Football Club also came into being that year, making it one of the earliest clubs established in any footballing code (Inverdale 2005). Yet much as modern sporting practices were beginning to acquire a significant status by the end of the fourth decade of the nineteenth century, departing from the folk origins of the more casual kind of sport represented in Webster's painting, so too would the very process for documenting such activities in visual form. For 1839 was also the year that the French artist and physicist, Louis-Jacques-Mandé Daguerre, publicly announced a new image-making process, which he called the Daguerreotype. Contrary to popular conceptions, this event did not proclaim the invention of the new medium of photography – Daguerre's colleague Joseph Nicéphore Niépce, the French-Brazilian Antoine Hercules Romuald Florence and the Englishman William Henry Fox Talbot had all produced earlier examples of photographic imagery (Frizot 1998, 21-3). The arrival of the Daguerreotype, however, followed shortly by Fox Talbot's calotype process, acted as a major catalyst for the development and expansion of photography in the modern era. Within a few years photographic processes were being widely deployed throughout Europe and beyond, thus making 1839 the generally accepted landmark year in photographic history.

What seems intriguing here is the extent to which the early development of photography largely coincided with the rise of sport as a significant form of social activity. This article seeks, therefore, to examine how early photography was deployed in the representation of sporting activities during the mid- to late-nineteenth century and how this contributed towards shaping conventions for sport

photography as a genre. Given this alignment, it is hardly surprising that, from its very inception, photography was widely deployed to document sport and sport-related activities, though few popular histories of the medium acknowledge this fact. Technical limitations, not least the necessity for long time exposures, inevitably limited the potential of photography to record sport in action, especially where speed and dynamic movement characterized practices. Yet, despite these limitations, sporting photographs were produced from very early on, initially in the form of staged genre scenes and portraiture of both famous and anonymous sportsmen and sportswomen. Later, as the technical capabilities of the medium developed, new vistas of visual possibilities opened up and photography was widely deployed to explore the high-speed movement of bodies in action. With the emergence of the halftone printing process during the 1880s and 1890s, photographs representing sport became more widely disseminated, not least as they began to appear regularly in a swath of new popular publications dedicated to sport.

### *Valuing the history of sports photography*

The important role played by sport within the early history of photography has generally been ignored. For example, as recently as 2011, Lynda Nead claimed,

Sports photography has been completely overlooked in the history of photography. It is unclear why this has been the case, but perhaps it is to do with its everyday nature and its association with the world of leisure; its place on the back pages rather than the front pages of news reporting. If sports photographs are the subjects of exhibitions, as, for example, in the exhibition of photographs of boxer Muhammad Ali in London in 2010, it is usually because of the identity of their subjects, in which the nature of the image changes from sports photograph to portrait. (Nead 2011, 309)

Nead's point regarding the potential re-classification of photographs of sport when displayed within an exhibition or museum context, is an important one, not least because it raises the question of what the term 'sports photography' might generally signify. Here, perhaps, the claim that this 'has been completely overlooked' might need some minor qualification as the last couple of decades have witnessed a number of exhibitions and publications that have explicitly claimed to offer a history of sports photography. In 1996, for example, during the Centenary Olympic Games in Atlanta, an exhibition and catalogue entitled *Visions of Victory: A Century of Sports Photography* set out to redress the fact that 'photographing sports has been underappreciated in comparison to photography's other genres' (Livingston 1996, 5). Similarly, *Sportscape: The Evolution of Sports Photography*, published in 2000, claimed on its inner sleeve to offer 'the most

comprehensive look at the art of sports photography ever produced' (Wombell 2000). Both publications, it should be added, are characterized by a paucity of textual content and critical or analytical engagement, whilst a glance through their contents indicates that their definition of sports photography, though rarely explained or justified, is rather narrow. In essence, this is largely confined to images of famous sportsmen and women either in action, in training, or as celebrities away from sporting activity; or photographs taken during key sporting events that are assumed, to a significant extent, to derive their value and meaning from an awareness of the event rather than the intrinsic values of the image itself. Perhaps more troublingly, the tendency here has been to assume that sports photography essentially began in the late nineteenth or early twentieth century. A more recent exhibition at the Brooklyn Museum in New York, *Who Shot Sports: A Photographic History 1843 to the Present* (2016) does, as the title suggests, include responses to sport by early photographers though the extent to which these works are taken seriously is perhaps reflected in the fact that they are confined to the appendix in the catalogue.

Here I want to examine in detail photographic works representing sport produced during the very earliest days of the new medium, the period that has to date been most overlooked. In particular I want to consider what visual conventions these early photographers of sport adopted for this new medium. As David Thorburn and Henry Jenkins have recently argued, the emergence of new media typically results less in an overthrow, than in a 'convergence' with older media. As they argue, 'If emerging media are often experimental and self-reflexive, they are also inevitably and centrally imitative, rooted in the past, in the practices, formats and deep assumptions their predecessors.' (Thorburn and Jenkins 2004, 7). Similarly these pioneers, whose work constitutes the foundation for the subsequent emergence of sports photography in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, embraced the possibilities and limitations of the new medium whilst simultaneously drawing extensively from the conventional art practices of their predecessors, engaging both artistry and artifice in their work to forge a new and dynamic genre. In this way they made a significant, though largely unacknowledged, contribution to the establishment of new visual forms and conventions in the development of sport photography's own visual aesthetic.

### *The first sport photographs*

The first photographic representation of a sporting subject was, perhaps unsurprisingly, produced in the sport-loving United Kingdom. This, however, was not in the leafy surroundings of the English metropolitan centres, where some of the earliest sports clubs had been established, but rather in the east lowlands of Scotland. As is widely acknowledged, two Edinburgh-based photographers, David Octavius Hill and Robert Adamson, were among the most prolific and artistically significant early practitioners to adopt the new medium. Widely esteemed in their day

and then largely forgotten for a century, Hill and Adamson are now much celebrated for their early use of the calotype (or Talbot-type), a process developed by the Englishman William Henry Fox-Talbot in the 1830s (Ford 1976, 10-11). As this process had been patented in England, but not north of the border, Hill and Adamson freely exploited the new medium to produce, amongst other works, portraits of the elite in Edinburgh and St Andrews, topographical representations of the region and genre scenes of local fisherfolk at Newhaven harbour just north of the Scottish capital. Much less well known are their representations of figures explicitly identifiable as sportsmen, despite the fact that these images constitute the very earliest examples of photographic representations of sport.

In 1843, for example, shortly after establishing their partnership, Hill and Adamson produced a striking photograph of a serious looking young man, believed to be a Mr Laing or Laine, posed as a tennis player (illus. 2) (Stevenson 2002, 88). The sitter adopts a dramatic posture, holding a tennis racket at waist height. His right leg is thrust forwards to the very edge of the composition whilst his torso leans back, his eyes focusing beyond the picture frame as if looking towards a ball in play. The black-and-white striped shirt, white trousers and soft canvas shoes signify participation in leisurely pursuits, though it is instantly clear that this is a carefully, even artfully, staged pose that has little to do with actual sporting action. The exposure time necessary at this stage to capture such an image required the sitter, as Fox Talbot himself would declare in the first volume of *The Pencil of Nature* published the following year, 'to maintain an absolute immobility for a few seconds of time' (Fox Talbot 1844-6). Whilst this technical requirement is typically highlighted as a limitation in early photography, it might be argued here that the tension between stillness and movement achieved as a consequence of this, contributes significantly to the impact of Hill and Adamson's work. To facilitate maintaining the pose for the duration of the exposure, the sitter was perched on a stool or tripod. This prop, though disguised by retouching, nonetheless remains evident in the final image. Equally important is the blurring of the racket-head, the only area of the photograph that is not in relatively sharp focus. As the retouching was executed later with full awareness of this blurring, it seems clear that Hill and Adamson did not perceive this as a failure, spoiling the overall effect. Indeed, while the blurring may well have been unintended, the overall effect is to add a sense of movement and dynamism to what would otherwise remain a rather stilted pose. Like the majority of Hill and Adamson's photographs, this image was captured out of doors. Unlike many of their portraits, however, this is here made a virtue, not least by the compositional emphasis on the sharply defined shadow on the background wall, echoing the profile of both player and racket and adding a further dynamism to the image. The length of shadow suggests a late afternoon or early evening, a time when tennis would typically be played, in contrast to the midday scenes more conventionally deployed to maximize light and disguise

intrusive shadows. The space occupied by the player is also worthy of analysis. The sitter is represented standing on paving slabs in front of a solid wall, probably a consequence of capturing the image in an area adjacent to Hill and Adamson's Edinburgh studio (Ford 1976, 26). This detail, however, also suggests an important historical context for the sporting subject matter. Produced fully three decades before Major Walter Clopton Wingfield first patented the game he called *Sphairistike*, the forerunner of modern Lawn Tennis, this work accordingly represents a participant in the traditional game subsequently referred to as Real Tennis (Gillmeister 1998, 174-7). Long associated with monarchy and aristocracy, this game was played within an enclosed, walled space derived from the medieval cloisters that are believed to be the original setting for the French game *jeu de paume* (Gillmeister 1998, 28). Here it might be noted that the oldest (Real) Tennis Court still in existence, the open-air, walled court at Falkland Palace in Fife, built for James V of Scotland in 1659, is situated midway between Hill and Adamson's studio in Edinburgh and the latter's native St Andrews, the two sites most strongly associated with the early photographers. Whilst there is no evidence to document Hill and Adamson's awareness of this local site of major significance for the history of tennis in Scotland, nor to indicate whether or not they had a personal interest in the game itself, the broader links between sport and the aristocratic and intellectual communities of Edinburgh and St Andrews were much in evidence at this time. Hill and Adamson's portrait of Mr Laing as a tennis player might thus be seen both as an early image of sport and as part of their wider artistic project to produce theatrical *tableaux vivants* of contemporary scenes with historical resonances, designed to capture the attention of a popular, image buying audience. Notably, the work also borrowed from more traditional artistic sources, such as Étienne Loys' 1753 *Portrait of Guillaume Barcellon*, professional tennis player to King Louis XV of France. As the earliest known example of a photograph representing a sporting subject, Hill and Adamson's tennis player forges a clear link between the representation of sportsmen in traditional and modern media, thus contributing to the early establishment of visual conventions for the photographic representation of sport. It is difficult, however, to determine who precisely were the audiences for these early images. The reproducibility of photographs certainly meant that Hill and Adamson could produce multiple copies that they sold to collectors, artists and consumers interested in the subject matter represented. Equally, in the absence of documentary evidence, it is impossible to determine what motivations consumers of these images had. It would be another half-century before the development of means to disseminate these images through publication in popular illustrated journals would generate a wider audience and consumer base for sport photography.

### *Imaging golf at St Andrews*

Hill and Adamson's focus on tennis clearly signifies the social importance of sport in Scotland in the mid-nineteenth century. In this context, however, tennis is perhaps not the first sporting activity to come to mind when considering the reputation of St Andrews. Golf has been practised in Scotland, and at St Andrews in particular, since at least the mid-sixteenth century and probably as early as a century before that (Carradice 2001, 142). Indeed by the end of the seventeenth century, the town was already being referred to as a 'metropolis of golfing', though interest in the game would decline over the following century (Carradice 2001, 142). However, when Hill and Adamson first established their photographic business, golf was notably experiencing something of a revival, having gained the Royal Patronage of William IV as recently as 1834 (Malcolm and Crabtree 2010, 22). A further indication of the growing cultural significance of the game was the publication in Edinburgh between 1833 and 1843 of three editions of *Golfiana, or Niceties Connected with the Game of Golf*, George Fullerton Carnegie's volume of collected poems about the game (Carnegie 1843). Given this context, it is perhaps unsurprisingly that Hill and Adamson's camera would focus on this most quintessential of Scottish sports. For example, between 1843 and 1847, Hill and Adamson produced a multi-figure composition showing a group of golfers and caddies gathered around a central figure about to make a putt (illus. 3). Once again, the outdoor setting implies an action shot, though the scene is clearly staged with all figures standing in a single horizontal line to form a balanced composition, focusing the viewer's attention on the dramatic moment of the putt itself. Here the staging of the image makes it more reminiscent of a classical frieze than a subject of modern life. An original print of this work in the collection of National Galleries Scotland has notably been annotated, though perhaps some years later, to indicate that the players represented constitute an elite of St Andrews golf at this time. Most significant amongst these is the central figure with club in hand, identified as Major (later Sir) Hugh Lyon Playfair. Having spent the best part of his career as an Officer in the East India Company, Playfair returned to Scotland in 1834 and in 1842 took up the post as Provost of the University of St Andrews. He was also a prolific golfer, regularly winning competitions and medals in tournaments held at St Andrews, including the Gold Medal in 1840 and 1842 (Lewis and Howe 2004, 40). Later he would Captain the Royal and Ancient Golf Club and be the driving force behind the building of the new clubhouse, still an iconic visual signifier of golfing history at St Andrews. Playfair was also a highly influential member of the intellectual community in which Hill and Adamson circulated (Lewis and Howe 2004, 40). Along with physicist, Sir David Brewster, a close friend of Fox Talbot, and physician John Adamson, older brother of Robert, Playfair was instrumental in founding the first-ever photographic society, the Edinburgh Calotype Club (Ford 1976, 17). He thus straddled the two worlds of photography and golf. Amongst the other figures identified in Hill and Adamson's photograph are two of the most famous players in



golfing history, Allan Robertson and Tom Morris senior (popularly known as ‘Old’ Tom Morris), second and third from the left. Robertson, widely held to be the first professional golfer, and the finest of his generation, made a significant living by winning bets against opponents (Carradice 2001, 145). His most famous apprentice was Tom Morris who frequently partnered Robertson in competitions and took over the mantle of professional and green-keeper at St Andrews after Robertson’s death. Others identified in the photograph include Capt David Campbell (far left), and the professional golfers, Bob Andrews, (behind Playfair) Willie Dunn and Watty Alexander (second and first from the right respectively). Yet it is Playfair who occupies centre-stage in the composition, even amongst this exalted golfing company. Social standing is thus given precedence over golfing ability, and both Robertson and Morris, the most highly regarded professionals of their day, are relegated to the sidelines. That these players, as well as Alexander, are posed carrying clubs, serves visually to associate them more with the role of caddy than player, thus reinforcing a social hierarchy elevating the amateur gentleman above the professional player.

It is also important here to consider what might have been the original purpose of Hill and Adamson’s golfing photograph. In 2002, the Scottish National Portrait Gallery acquired a major new work, a large-scale oil painting entitled *The Golfers: A Grand Match played over the Links of St Andrews on the day of the Annual Meeting of The Royal and Ancient Golf Club* (illus. 4). The work, described by then Director Sir Timothy Clifford as ‘one of the greatest icons of the game of golf’, is a modern-life, multi-figure composition produced in 1847 by the Scottish portraitist, Charles Lees (Lewis and Howe 2004, 9). This work preceded more famous grand narrative paintings produced in early Victorian Britain, such as Ford Madox Brown’s *Work* (1852-65) and William Powell Frith’s *Ramsgate Sands* (1851-4) and, more pertinently for its sporting subject, *Derby Day* (1856-8). Here, however, it is its significance for Hill and Adamson’s photograph that is of interest. Like the photograph, Lees’ painting positions the top-hatted Playfair (centre-left, having just struck the ball) as the focal point of the composition. Campbell also appears as the most prominent figure amongst the background group on the far right whilst the golfer, Dunn, peaks around the shoulder of the elderly seated figure in the lower-right foreground. More importantly, Robertson also occupies a prominent position standing immediately behind the foreground crouching figure to the left of Playfair. Robertson again carries clubs underneath his arm and stands in a posture virtually identical to his appearance in the Hill and Adamson photograph. The similarity between the representations of Playfair (though reversed) and Robertson has led Lewis and Howe to speculate that Lees used the photograph as an aide to his composition and may even have commissioned it explicitly for this purpose (Lewis and Howe 2004, 28). Indeed one of the key roles photography served in its earliest days was to provide material from which artists could work, so this conclusion seems particularly convincing. A key

question here, is whether the decision to differentiate, in visual terms, gentlemen and players was initially made by Hill and Adamson, in the original photograph, or was a requirement of Lees. It is certainly the case that the two prominent figures also represented carrying clubs in the right foreground of Lees' painting were professional golfers (Sandy Pirie and Sandy Pirie Jr). Either way, it is clear that whilst golf and photography both played a significant role in bringing different classes into the same social frame, this visual shorthand nonetheless ensured that a distinction was both maintained and communicated visually to the spectator. This differentiation of class would shape much sport photography throughout the remainder of the nineteenth century and beyond.

The close relationship between sport and photography in early Victorian Scotland would continue well into the second half of the nineteenth century, a factor evidenced in the photographic archive at the University of St Andrews. In the 1850s and 1860s, for example, Hill and Adamson's staged, panoramic portrait format was widely replicated by photographers such as Thomas Rodger and George Middlemas Cowie. Rodger, additionally, would modify Hill and Adamson's strict class juxtapositions by bringing professional golfers into his St Andrews studio and representing them independently. As early as 1850, for example, Rodger photographed Robertson, at this point at the apex of his golfing career, striking a dignified, upright pose framed on the right by hanging drapery (illus. 5). Here, the sitter holds a club firmly in his right hand, partly as a means to secure support for the time of exposure, but also to replicate the appearance of a gentleman's walking cane. As Roy Strong has argued in relation to the work of Hill and Adamson, early Scottish portrait photographs

belong to a definite stylistic tradition of portrait painting in Scotland. In many ways, much of what has been described as the their 'enigmatic charm' springs from the fact that these photographs represent the final flowering of a concept of recording human likeness first established as a style by Sir Henry Raeburn at the close of the century. (Ford 1976, 51)

To reinforce this point, Strong compares Hill and Adamson's photographic portrait of Thomas Duncan with Raeburn's portrait of John Crichton Stuart, Second Marquess of Bute (1821), a comparison that might equally be made with Rodger's portrait of Robertson. Certainly the posture adopted by Robertson echoes the earlier portrait of a major landowner and member of the aristocracy, whilst the confident gaze beyond the picture frame suggests an individual of much self-assurance. Yet other details reinforce Robertson's less socially elevated status. The presence not only of an additional club, but also of two golf balls lying in a prominent position to the right, serve to signify Robertson's status specifically as a professional player. Moreover, the weight of

Robertson's right hand pocket implies the likely presence of further balls. As Rodger, and indeed any contemporary viewer who recognized the golfer would be aware, Robertson's reputation at this time lay not only in his playing ability. He was also an established tradesman, having taken over his father's business manufacturing and selling golfing equipment not just locally, but all over the world. Without doubt, his most significant product was the so-called 'featherie' golf ball, a hand-stitched, leather sphere stuffed with boiled-down chicken or goose feathers. Robertson, assisted by his apprentice Tom Morris, had effectively cornered not only the local, but also the global market for this expensive product. However, in 1850, Robertson's virtual monopoly was under threat following the development of a new ball known as a 'guttie'. Manufactured from gutta-percha, a rubber-like substance found in Malaysia, the 'guttie' was significantly cheaper to manufacture than the hand-stuffed 'featherie'. Further, many believed that its aerodynamic qualities were a significant improvement on the older model. Though aware of the threat to his commercial enterprise, Robertson belligerently resisted the new 'guttie' ball, even falling out with Morris after discovering that his apprentice had used one in a match (Malcolm and Crabtree 2010, 33-4). Shortly after this, Morris left Robertson's employ to set himself up in England. In this context, the presence of the 'featheries' in Rodger's portrait of Robertson acquires an additional significance. They thus become attributes to signify not only Robertson's status as golfer, but also as a manufacturer of a major product, and one happy to use his own image to promote his commercial interests. Indeed this image might be seen as one of the earliest examples of the photographic image of a sportsman deployed, at least in part, to endorse a commercial product. Ultimately, however, Rodger may also be alluding to a weakness in Robertson's character, a steadfastness, perhaps even an inflexibility, in the face of technological and commercial change.

### *The Morris dynasty*

In the mid 1870s, perhaps one of the most famous photographic portraits of early sportsmen, and golfers in particular, was produced (illus. 6).<sup>4</sup> This double portrait by an unknown photographer, possibly named Sawyer, represents the Morris dynasty, including in the background, Robertson's former apprentice, 'Old' Tom Morris, and beside him, wielding a club, his son, 'Young' Tom Morris. The image, once more, was clearly produced in a studio, the golfers posing against a painted backdrop. Both wear hats, the former a cap at a jaunty angle, the latter a glengarry, which he was known to wear during tournament play. The senior figure stands upright, like Robertson, his club simultaneously reminiscent of a walking cane. His posture, however, is far less rigid than in Rodger's earlier portrait. Whilst this may be a consequence of a significantly shorter exposure time, it perhaps also suggests a greater informality of character. The younger Morris is represented addressing a golf ball with an open stance typical of the chip shot for which

he was particularly renowned. Here, however, the three-quarter-body posture also facilitates a near-full face representation. Indeed the adoption of this open stance, halfway between action shot and posed portrait, had previously been introduced in 1855 in an outdoor portrait of the aforementioned Capt Campbell taken by Rodger (illus. 7). Clad in tartan jacket and also wearing a glengarry, Campbell here poses in front of the doorway to a humble cottage door, a setting perhaps more intended to suggest a specifically Scottish rural setting than a bad lie. Campbell's focus is straight towards the camera, thus constructing the viewer as the target towards which the shot is aimed. The low crouch suggests the pent-up energy about to be released by the swing of the club. In contrast, the pose of 'Young' Tom Morris is more upright and relaxed, suggestive of a golfer with little to prove to the spectator. The presence of Morris senior, here literally backing up his son, confers upon the portrait an aura of easeful confidence, one that reflected the position of both players within their sport. Indeed, they had more than sufficient cause for such confidence. Following the foundation of the British Open Golf Championship in 1860, 'Old' Tom Morris had dominated the early years of the competition winning in 1861, 1862, 1864 and 1867. His failure to win in 1868 was as a consequence of defeat to his then 17 year-old son, who also won in 1869, 1870 and 1872 (no competition was held in 1871). Thus, by the early 1870s the Morrises, father and son, had occupied a position at the very pinnacle of their professional sport for over a decade. But this, as things transpired, was not to last. In September 1875, while partnering his father in a team match, 'Young' Tom Morris received a telegram requesting his urgent return as his pregnant wife had gone into labour. Before reaching home, however, he learned that both his wife and the child had died (Malcolm and Crabtree 2010, 137-41). In October of that year, Morris himself fell ill and died suddenly on Christmas Day 1875, less than four months after his initial loss. He was just 24 years old (Malcolm and Crabtree 2010, 147).

The tragedy endured by 'Young' Tom Morris has had a significant impact upon the status and legacy of this photograph, inevitably shaping the image of the champion golfer in the public domain. Shortly after his death, for example, a proposal was made to honour Morris by erecting a funerary monument at the site of his grave in St Andrews' Cathedral cemetery. The Edinburgh-based sculptor John Rhind was commissioned to produce the work, which was subsequently unveiled in 1878 (illus. 8). Intriguingly, Rhind abandoned the allegorical approach more conventionally deployed for funerary monuments and instead designed a relief sculpture representing Morris in the exact pose adopted in the photograph. Indeed the similarity between photograph and monument – the sole exception being that Morris' jacket, undone in the original, has here been buttoned – makes it clear that Rhind used this photograph as his primary source material. The other key difference, of course, is the excision of 'Old' Tom from this representation, thus isolating the deceased golfer and diminishing the original message of dynastic

continuity. As Tom Gunning reminds us, ‘The ties of frozen images to death have been widely remarked upon from the beginning, when photographs took on an important role in memorial imagery, to the recent eloquent characterization by Roland Barthes of photographers as the agents of the image of death’ (Thorburn and Jenkins, 2004, 49). Here the literal transition from photograph to material monument situated in a graveyard further reinforces this connection between the photograph and death as elaborated upon by Barthes (Barthes 1981, 13-15).

The last few decades have witnessed a global explosion in the production of civic monuments dedicated to sportsmen and sportswomen (Stride, Wilson and Thomas 2013, 148-60). Significantly, many of these monuments have also been based directly on photographic sources. At the front of this long line, however, stands Rhind’s ‘Young’ Tom Morris funerary monument, the earliest manifestation of photography’s direct impact upon the production of a public monument to a sporting hero.

### *William Notman and early sport photography in North America*

In the latter part of the nineteenth century, yet one more Scottish photographer, this time an émigré to Canada, would make another significant impact on the development of early sporting photography. In 1874, William Notman produced the earliest photographic representation of team sports in action. (illus. 9) *Harvard versus McGill Football Match* represents a groundbreaking moment in North American football history. In May that year the Redmen team from McGill University in Canada travelled south to Cambridge, Massachusetts to play the Crimson team from Harvard in a series of three intercollegiate games. As the rules of football had yet to be standardized, the teams agreed to play two matches, the first deploying the ‘Boston rules’ adopted by Harvard, the second, McGill’s own regulations (Zukerman 2012). The former was a round ball, kicking game broadly following the Association (later dubbed ‘soccer’) rules that had been established in England in 1863. The latter, based more on English rugby, allowed handling and running with an oval ball. Harvard secured a 3:0 victory in the first match whilst the second ended without score (Zukerman 2012). Subsequently, Harvard abandoned the kicking game in preference to McGill’s handling version and thus these contests have gone down in popular sporting folklore as the catalyst for the subsequent development of north-American style football. Notman’s photograph thus commemorates this iconic moment in American sporting development and is frequently reproduced in histories of the game. However, even at first glance, it is clear that this is a far cry from a straightforward image documenting a specific historical moment. By the mid 1870s Notman had become one of the most prolific and pre-eminent photographers in Canada, having established professional studios in Montreal, Toronto, Ottawa and Halifax and further secured seasonal branches in the north-eastern United States photographing students and faculty at

Vassar College, Princeton and Harvard (Parsons 2014, 7). Like most professional photographers of this era, Notman's stock-in-trade was portraiture. As a member of Montreal's artistic community, however, he was also committed to producing more creative works, many of which notably embraced sport, particularly local winter sports, as a popular theme (Poulter 2009, 166-74). Initially these works, like Hill and Adamson's early 'action' shots, were carefully staged affairs. His *Tobogganist* (c. 1875), for example, reveals how Notman constructed complex, purpose-built studio sets with specially painted backdrops for dramatic effect (illus. 10). *Group of Curlers* (1867) was similarly composed and shot in the studio with the figures posed on a plate of zinc, highly polished to resemble ice (Parsons 2014, 17). *Harvard versus McGill Football Match*, however, reveals an alternative practice widely embraced by Notman at this time. The image is, in fact, a composite, constructed from multiple individual photographs staged and shot separately, usually in a studio, and then montaged to create a carefully preconceived final composition (Hall, Dodds and Triggs 1993, 166-7). The following year, Notman produced an even more elaborate composite photograph notionally representing the same event. It is noteworthy here that Notman's work, though constructed from photographs, bears more than a passing resemblance to the compositional conventions deployed by the graphic artists who regularly illustrated sporting events for the contemporary press (illus. 11). These, in turn, also drew significantly on the compositional devices developed in painted scenes of sporting play, epitomized by Webster's *A Football Game*, with which this article opened. Notman's studio had acquired considerable expertise in the technique of composite photography, a practice originally developed in the 1850s in Britain (where it was more typically referred to as combination printing). The most famous exponents of this were Oscar G. Rejlander and Henry Peach Robinson, whose works, such as *The Two Ways of Life* (1857) and *Fading Away* (1858) have acquired renown within photographic histories. Unlike his predecessors, however, Notman was happy to paste his figures onto painted backdrops as evidenced here, thus aligning his images more closely with contemporary paintings and adding an artistic prestige to his work.<sup>5</sup> By the time of his death in 1891, Notman's studios were turning out both staged and composite photographs in the thousands, with sporting scenes featuring significantly. These were eagerly purchased by the burgeoning collectors of photographs, many of whom built up their own albums of images. A catalogue of sports represented in Notman's studios would include, in addition to the above-mentioned activities, athletics, boxing, cricket, fencing, ice hockey, lacrosse, polo, skating, tennis, wrestling, rowing and yachting.<sup>6</sup> After his death Notman sporting composites even began to appear in the sporting press where they were presented as if they represented live action.<sup>7</sup>

### *Conclusion*

The period from 1839 to the mid 1870s played a pivotal role in the establishment of visual conventions for the representation of sport in photographic form. Initially, this was confined to traditional forms of portraiture, or to posed shots that contrived to represent sporting action. Here, the relative stillness conventionally adopted by tennis players and golfers shortly before engaging in play provided a suitable opportunity for photographers to reference sporting practices. When more dramatic action was required, the composite technique could compensate for the technical limitations of the medium. In both cases, art and artifice were openly and creatively deployed not only to enhance the visual representation of these modern activities, but also to establish clear links to visual conventions within a broader history of art. In the years that followed this period, both technological and aesthetic advances would transform the possibilities for photography's relationship with sport. From the high-speed photography of Eadweard Muybridge and Étienne-Jules Marey to the mass publication of specialist photo-illustrated sports journals, facilitated by the development of the halftone printing process, photographic representations of sport would play an increasingly important role in the visual landscape of the fin-de-siècle world and beyond, shaping popular perceptions of sport as an integral aspect of modern culture.<sup>8</sup> In 1898, the Frenchman Pierre Lafitte launched what might be considered as one of the most innovative and visually striking of these early photo-illustrated journals, *La Vie au grand air*. In the true Anglo-French competitive spirit of the time Lafitte explicitly set out to counter the perception that 'les Anglais' were the dominant sporting nation by demonstrating how France had now become 'le Pays du Muscle par excellence' (Lafitte 1898, 1). His goal, however, was not only to foreground France's sporting excellence but also to link this to his nation's well-established reputation as a global centre for art, thus producing what he explicitly described as 'un album tout aussi artistique' (Lafitte 1898, 1). Yet, while competing with 'les Anglais', Lafitte had perhaps forgotten the achievements of 'les Écossais', the true artistic pioneers of early sports photography.

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- <sup>1</sup> [http://www.bbc.co.uk/pressoffice/pressreleases/stories/2005/09\\_september/05/painting.shtml](http://www.bbc.co.uk/pressoffice/pressreleases/stories/2005/09_september/05/painting.shtml)
- <sup>2</sup> Amongst the works most widely discussed by contemporary critics were: William Etty's *Diana and Endymion*; Daniel Maclise's *Robin Hood and his Merry Men Entertaining Richard the Lionheart in Sherwood Forest*; and Turner's *Ancient Rome, Agrippina Landing with the Ashes of Germanicus* and *Pluto Carrying off Proserpine*.
- <sup>3</sup> Earlier races, referred to as the Liverpool Grand Steeplechase, had been staged at Aintree between 1836 and 1838. See John Pinfold, 'Where the Champion Horses Run: The Origins of Aintree Racecourse and the Grand National', *International Journal of the History of Sport*, 15/2 (1998), pp. 137-51.
- <sup>4</sup> The loose attribution to 'Sawyer' is based on the inscription 'Sawyers Collection' on an early print dated 1875 in the collection of the photograph archive of the University of St Andrews.
- <sup>5</sup> For more on Notman's composite works see, Stanley G. Triggs, *The Composite Photographs* (Toronto, 2005).
- <sup>6</sup> An extensive number of Notman's photographs can be accessed via the McCord Museum online archive at [www.musee-mccord.qc.ca](http://www.musee-mccord.qc.ca), accessed 15 March 2016.
- <sup>7</sup> For example, in 1900 the French sporting periodical *La Vie au grand air* published two of Notman's studio staged bobsleigh photographs alongside a composite representing an ice hockey match in Montreal to accompany an article reporting on winter sports. See Géo Lange, 'Sports d'Hiver', *La Vie au grand air*, 70, 14 January 1900, p. 232.
- <sup>8</sup> For a fuller account of the history of early photo-illustrated sports journals see Mike O'Mahony, *Photography and Sport* (London, 2018 - forthcoming)